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SOCIAL ACTION DIGEST®

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Following is full text of a statement by the Catholic Bishops of the United States on Nov. 20, 1960, after their annual meeting in Washington, D. C.:

The history and achievements of America stand as a monument to the personal responsibility of free men. Our institutions and our industry, the fruit of the American sense of responsibility, have in the past inspired, guided and helped many other nations of the world. If our future is to be worthy of our past, if the fruit of America's promise is not to wither before it has reached full maturity, our present preeminent need is to reaffirm the sense of individual obligation, to place clearly before ourselves the foundation on which personal responsibility rests, to determine the causes of its decay and to seek the means by which it can be revived.

The foremost signs of the decline of personal responsibility are to be found in the family. Marriage, a sacred and binding contract, all too often is considered merely as an arbitrary arrangement to satisfy the instinct of pleasure. The failure of parents to fulfill their responsibilities, as revealed in the frequency of divorce, desertion and broken homes, is a national disgrace. Any delinquency of parents may well be reflected in the delinquency of youth, which is now commonly considered our greatest national domestic problem.

Equally conspicuous is the evidence of decline in the sense of responsibility within our industrial organization and in our general economic life. At a time when so much depends upon the soundness of our economy and upon our ability to produce to meet the needs of a rapidly developing world, we have been faced by a frequent lack of truly responsible leadership, both on the part of management and of labor. Among the evident instances of the breakdown of personal responsibility, most deplorable has been the widespread cynical reaction to the recent revelation of dishonesty, waste and malfeasance in industrial relations.

Although personal responsibility and initiative have been our national characteristics, explaining in large measure our country's progress in human welfare, yet pressures are growing for a constantly greater reliance on the collectivity rather than on the individual. An inordinate demand for benefits, most easily secured by the pressures of organization, has led an ever-growing number of our people to relinquish their rights and to abdicate their responsibilities. This concession creates a widening spiral of increasing demands and pressures with a further infringe nent on personal freedom and responsibility.

The result is the condition recently noted by our Holy Father: "Modern man sees that the sphere in which he can think for himself, act on his own initiative, exercise his responsibilities and affirm and enrich his personality is in many cases restricted to an excessive degree." (Letter of July 12, 1960, to the *Semaine Sociale* [week of social studies held annually in France] in Grenoble.) Intensive socialization can achieve mass benefits, but man and morality can be seriously hurt in the process.

This tendency to delegate excessive responsibility to an organization is discernible also in the realm of international affairs. Some manifest no sense of personal responsibility in the affairs of the international community. On the other hand, many citizens seem to feel that our mere adherence to the United Nations absolves us from further responsibility in the international order and that decisions made by the United Nations, regardless of their objective value, are always to be regarded as morally right.

Admitting the undoubted value of a policy of supporting the United Nations and recognizing the genuine contribution it has made in many areas, we must understand clearly that the citizens of this country, and of all countries, have a responsibility to judge and to evaluate the United Nations' deliberations and decisions according to objective norms of morality universally binding. This involves also the duty of citizens to make proper representation of such judgment to their respective governments.

However varied the above-mentioned evils, ranging from the single act of wrongdoing to the moral laxity of the mass mind, the root cause is the same—the rejection of personal responsibility. This is a moral evil, as are all the major ills that beset the present world. As such their cure is largely within the power of individual persons. A godly society is the work of godly men. Even the most universal evil and the threatened mechanization of man can be made to yield before the just and determined wills of individual persons.

Our Holy Father has pointed out the capacity of the individual in the face of such problems. "Does it follow that the process of socialization is impossible to control and that, increasing constantly in its breadth and depth, it will one day surely reduce men to the role of automatons? Certainly not. For socialization is not the result of forces of nature acting according to determinism that cannot be changed. It is the work of man, of a free being conscious of and responsible for his acts." (Letter of July 12, 1960, to *Semaine Sociale.*)

In our national life we have experienced the truth of this

EDITOR: Rev. Hubert F. Schiffer, S. J.
Assoc. Professor of Economics.
Loyola University, New Orleans 18, La.

EDITORIAL BOARD: Henry J. Engler, Dean, College of Business Administration.
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statement. Our progress has been achieved chiefly according to the measure of individual commitment to responsibility. The heroes of our history have not been blind forces but stout-hearted persons; our worthy national goals have been achieved not as a result of environment but by men who made their environment. A strong and responsible nation is fashioned by responsible persons, not group pressures. As Pope Pius XII stated: "The people live from the fullness of the life of the men who make it up; each of them in his place and in the manner proper to him is a person conscious of his own responsibilities and of his own convictions." (Christmas message, 1944.)

What is personal responsibility in the context of man's relation to the world? It presupposes the acceptance of one's dignity as a son of God in whatever environment he may be placed and the acknowledgment of binding moral law. It requires the free and deliberate acceptance of one's obligations in the position he occupies—in the family, in the church, in the corporation, in the labor union, in the community, in the nation, in the family of nations. It demands the rule of conscience, not self-satisfaction. It recognizes that every deliberate action of the human person has a relationship with his Creator and His purpose in creating the world. It affirms that every human action a man performs derives its significance from that relationship and makes him a co-operator with his Creator in forwarding the Kingdom of God. It is the solemn profession that consequently every product of his mind and his hand, every bounty wrung from the earth is to serve that high purpose. As man, bearing the image of his Creator, is the brother of every other human person, his noblest work is to bring to his fellow man the blessings of the destiny intended for him by God.

It must be emphasized, especially in these times, that the freedom innate in man, as well as the social nature he enjoys, demands as a correlative the fullest personal responsibility. "Therefore every one of us will render an account for himself to God." (Rom. 14:12) The marvelous inventiveness of the human mind, conquering space and making each man a neighbor of every other human being on earth, gives urgency to this twofold need: to maintain one's freedom by using it according to the limits and norms of rightful authority; to use it also according to his social nature and the needs of his fellow man. "For you have been called to liberty, brethren; only do not use liberty as an occasion for sensuality but by charity serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'" (Galatians 5:13, 14)

The social pressures of today's complex life do not excuse from, but rather create a demand for, a greater exercise of personal responsibility. No man can be neutral in a moral cause. By his creation he is born to be committed to the cause of God. The more difficult the situation the more imperative the need for such a commitment.

If we are to restore man to his sense of personal responsibility and to the acceptance of life as a mission, we must understand more clearly the moral causes which have undermined men's sense of responsibility.

First among these causes has been the marked decline in the force of religious convictions. Washington warned the American people that they should indulge with caution the supposition that national morality could exist without religion. In spite of the much-discussed increase of church membership it cannot be doubted that for a long time religious influences have been losing their vigor among the American people, with a debilitating effect in consequence on both public and private life.

As a result of this decline of religious convictions, the grasp on moral principles has been greatly weakened. Through a faulty concept of morality modern man has come to imagine that sudden and drastic changes in situations change principles; that principles no longer control situations, but rather that situations shape principles. Inevitably this type of "situational ethics" denies all unchanging principles and makes futile all moral judgments on which the sense of responsibility rests. The need which the world faces is the acceptance of an objective norm of morality, and hence of conduct.

This decline in religious belief and moral conviction leaves modern man blind to his immutable spiritual nature. Thus, wittingly or unwittingly, he aligns himself with the

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Christmas

Greetings

The editor and staff

of

SOCIAL ACTION DIGEST

send to all of you

their prayerful wishes

for a joyful Christmas

and a happy New Year

This drawing is one in a series of beautiful Christmas cards designed and printed by the art department of XAVIER UNIVERSITY, Palmetto and Pine Sts., New Orleans 25, La.

forces of materialism among whose tenets there is no room for the concept of personal responsibility.

Finally, the social ideals and purposes of modern man, due to the declining influence of religious and moral convictions and to the triumph of the material, tend in many subtle ways to efface the sense of responsibility. As a people we seem to be moving more deeply into a sensate culture. There is an excessive preoccupation with material security at the expense of spiritual well-being. Uniformity of thought and supine loyalty to the organization, whether it be the industrial corporation, the labor union, or the political party, are too often encouraged and rewarded.

Rise of "the Organizational Man"

The organizational man, cloaked in a sort of anonymity, rather than the responsible individual, is favored and advanced. The preparation for this condition is found even in the field of education, where emphasis is placed on adapting oneself to the thinking of the group. This pattern is so prevalent that some psychologists consider juvenile delinquency as a revolt, just for the sake of rebellion, against a stifling uniformity that fails to challenge the individuality of the student.

The correction of these basically moral evils and the restoration of a vigorous sense of personal responsibility belong primarily to the field of religion. The development of a truly Christian character is primarily the task of religion, although its inculcation is of vital concern to the state. It is the function of religion to teach man his unique dignity as a son of God and brother of Christ. Pope Pius XII explicitly stated this in describing the function of the Church: "Always and everywhere, by unceasingly adapting herself to the circumstances of time and place, she seeks to model persons, individuals and, as far as possible, all individuals according to the laws of Christ, thus attaining the moral basis for social life. The object of the Church is man, naturally good, imbued, ennobled and strengthened by the truth and grace of Christ." (Sept. 19, 1955.)

Deepened religious convictions will bolster and reactivate the sense of personal responsibility. We must seek to enlarge the area of personal autonomy to protect the human personality from a greater encroachment on its freedom and responsibility. The individual person must assume as his proud right the accomplishment of whatever he can for himself and for others, especially those of his family, and herein lies the importance of the Christian home. The same principle of responsibility must be consistently applied to every level of action.

Pope Pius XI explicitly emphasized this principle of subsidiarity in the "*Quadragesimo Anno*" published in 1931: "Just as one cannot take away from individuals and transfer to the community the tasks they are capable of accomplishing by themselves, thus it would also be an injustice—and at the same time a harmful disturbance of the social order—if one were to remove from groups of lower rank functions they can exercise themselves and entrust them to a wider collectivity of higher rank. The natural objective of any intervention in social matters is to assist the members of the social body and not to destroy or absorb them."

Even when man enters into associations, as he must to achieve the goals which lie beyond his individual capacity, he should remember their purpose is in relation to his freedom and responsibility. In this respect, the Holy Father stated: "But this is to be done on the condition that each of these institutions remains within its own sphere of responsibility; that it be offered to, not imposed upon, the free choice of mankind. They must under no circumstances look upon themselves as an end making their members an instrument of their activity." (Letter of July 12, 1960, to *Semaine Sociale.*)

A fresh evocation of the principle and practice of personal responsibility can revivify our society and help to stem the seemingly inexorable march toward the automation of human beings and the steady loss of that freedom which is man's distinctive attribute. It will cure the mental lethargy and inertia which permit organizations to usurp, mainly by default, the rights of their members. It will stimulate a self-reliance which will automatically restore the balance between freedom and security. It will reject unwarranted pressure from groups that seek unjustly to aggrandize their power and will restrict them to their lawful ends. It will see in all business ventures of whatever size a means of serving others as well as self. It will have an immediate effect in every sphere of life—in the home, in the office, as well as in the workshop, in the factory, in our schools, in our cultural groups.

An effective response to a call for personal responsibility need not wait for a mass movement. The response belongs to the individual person, as our Holy Father indicated: "Fully conscious of what is at stake, moved by his apostolic zeal, he then makes a personal engagement with these communities that surround him, the result of a free and justified choice of careful thought about himself, his destiny and the world." (Letter of July 12, 1960, to *Semaine Sociale.*)

Such a response by a representative number, given only in the silent sanctuary of the heart, will begin to have its leavening effect. Our appeal for action is made directly to our Catholic fellow citizens, but it reaches out also to all Americans who face the same problems as ourselves.

"Before It Is Too Late—"

Before it is too late, we must revive in our midst and present to the world the ideals that have been the real source of national greatness. For America will fulfill its destiny when we have achieved that spiritual maturity, described by Pope Pius XII, as men "established in their inviolable integrity as images of God; men proud of their personal dignity and of their wholesome freedom; men justly jealous of their equality with their fellow creatures in all that concerns the most intimate depths of human dignity; men solidly attached to their land and their tradition." (Pope Pius XII, Feb. 20, 1946.)

Signed by members of the Administrative Board, National Catholic Welfare Conference, in the name of the Bishops of the United States:

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Loneliness in the Apostolate

by Vincent J. Giese

After seven years I have finally cured my apostolic itch. As an old timer in lay apostolic circles, I am finally settled into this lay apostolate business. As such I would like to permit myself a few reflections as we begin the 1960's. I would like to come to the defense of those fledgling apostles now coming onto the scene. What is it going to be like?

First of all—in this status-conscious age—I submit that our dedicated lay apostles are still without status in the Church. Running the risk of all the Johnny-come-religious sociologists coming after me with their copies of the Reisman's and Packard's and all the rest, I maintain that despite all the hullabaloo about Catholic Action and lay responsibility the laity still have no status. We are still second-class citizens.

I say this now, lest everyone slip into the comfy 1960's with a kind of complacency that the age of the Laity has finally arrived and all is well. "We got them organized, spiritualized, and deployed to various outposts of the temporal order, so all we need to do now is sit back and watch those institutions change."

In saying the laity are without status in the Church, I point a finger at no one. I simply do not believe that clergy and laity have yet learned to live together in all this apostolate business. We still do not speak a common language. The pious exhortations and clerical pats on the back we humbly receive today are symbols that lay people really can't be trusted in the work of the Church, that strings have to be attached to them, just in case they have to be pulled back off the firing line for fear of making embarrassing conquests. For example, when I attended a neighborhood block meeting at a Universalist Church, one clerical friend was aghast that I might be endangering my faith. The fact that I was a layman engaged in community action—not in religious service—didn't seem to carry much weight.

While I have no intention of making Pat Keegan an accomplice to this article, a few of us discussed this with Pat last fall when he was in Chicago. The discussion started innocently enough when I simpy asked Pat who really cares about Keegan? Who really is concerned about this forty-two year old dedicated layman who has given the best part of his manhood to the lay apostolate? Who cares about this Knight of St. Gregory who cannot afford to buy the togs that go with the honor?

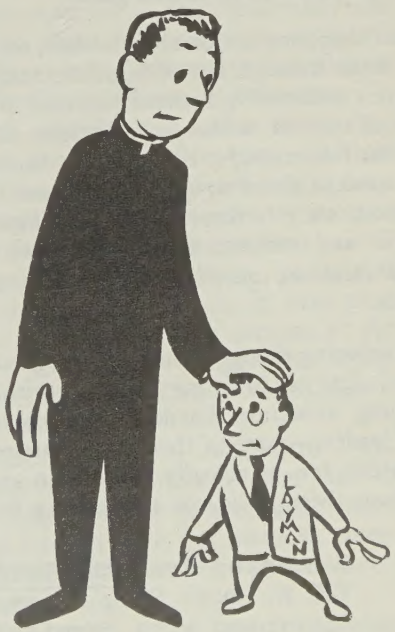
Let me take this off the personal note and simply ask who really cares about most of our dedicated lay apostles—especially those fulltime workers who give several years of their life to a movement, without concern for the next night's lodging? Who is worried and responsible for a team of lay missionaries in Africa or Colombia? What status do they have in the Church? Out of sight, out of mind seems to fit the apostolate as well as romances between boys in the service and childhood sweethearts down the street.

We are busy now training laymen for all kinds of apostolic work. We are imbuing them with the spirit of dedication, bringing an increasing number to the point where they are ready and willing to give several years of their life to some form of the apostolate. We are notching our belts with achievements. But are we over-taxing the Holy Spirit when we send them out, too often without portfolio and without guaranteeing them a place to lay their heads?

I am calling for an apostolic shake-down as we begin the 1960's. I do not think it is a particular violation of the spirit of poverty to recognize that the cost of living has gone up for lay-workers in the past ten years as well as for steel workers. I'm not asking for lay apostles to go out on strike. I merely submit that $5.00 or $7.50 a week is not enough to keep a fulltime apostle on the road. I am simply asking for human decency in the way we recognize and treat these professional lay ministers, for living wages, and for the accepted standards of social security. I wonder if there will be an Old People's Home for lay apostles, or will they continue to pray for an early death?

I am not trying to make a fetish of money and security, but I am saying the lack of professional status we give these dedicated laity in the Church is somewhat scandalous, as though a plague would bedevil them and kill off their apostolic spirit were they not perpetually hungry or nerve-wracked or ulcerated.

From another point of view, as we organize and institutionalize forms of the apostolate, we are going to need professional help. We are going to need all kinds of competencies, specialized skills — many times gained only through higher education or from service in the secular world. I am convinced we are going to have to pay decent salaries for these skills and give normal job security, and



I refuse to believe we are going to get less dedicated people if we do so.

My point is this. No one seems scandalized that our clergy in America have professional status and are cared for in their basic human needs. It seems almost ironic that the only way to get a decent break in the lay apostolate is to take the vow of poverty. Those who do not take it seem to have all the poverty. I am sure we do not want our lay apostolate to be restricted to secular institutes.

Believe me, I have not been approached by any of our lay sacrificial lambs to turn my pen to this problem. I simply feel we ought to tune up our lay operations a bit during the 1960's, and who knows, we may raise our professional standards in the process. We may attract a more competent personnel that now runs the other way when we try to explain the glories of the apostolate.

Nor am I being anti-clerical when I state the obvious fact that there is professional status in the priesthood, that all the symbols of status are attached to the priesthood in America, from comfortable rectories, gasoline powered automobiles, black suits and white collars to occasional red robes. I am not opposed to all this, for we want our priests to have status in our status-conscious society where they must identify themselves to carry out their priestly vocation.

And I feel sure that our dedicated laity do not want anything more than respect, recognition, and the necessities of life. Nobody works for the Church to make a killing, but care and concern are fundamental things we owe to every human being.

To shift the discussion to another level—and off the status kick, which after all is superficial—I wonder whether or not our Catholic Action chaplains take a sufficiently deep and sustained personal interest in their lay leaders. It is an awesome responsibility to lead a man to discover his lay vocation, to help him make a commitment to Christ and His Church, to urge him to become a sort of fool for Christ. It is a responsibility that does not end once the lay person finally makes his commitment, whether it be to give several years of his life to the Church or simply to take an office in the parish Catholic Action group.

Do our chaplains sustain their leaders, encourage them, stick with them through the self-doubts, temptations, setbacks? Is there a relationship between neuroses in the apostolate and a lack of concern on the part of priests. Do we send married apostles, for example, to primitive foreign missions, with little concern about dysentery, different food habits, inconveniences, etc.? Is there an unholy abandon here, without prudent and common-sense judgment? I don't know. I simply raise the question in order to stir up some self-analysis.

It is a sobering thought when Pat Keegan tells me he spends a good deal of his time "sticking-with," sustaining, encouraging sometimes financing the ten or more dedicated YCW leaders—some of them now married—whom he feels responsible for, principally because no one else really worries about these people or really cares for them. I can see this problem multiplying all over during the next ten years as our Catholic Action movements expand and develop and take on numerous staff workers and send many more to the missions. Who will care about them? That's all I want to ask, lest we got so preoccupied with organization, structures, programs and projects that we lose sight of the human beings invlved in all this development. It is the old problem illustrated by parents who get so involved in community work that their own children become delinquent, out of sheer neglect.

This is why I say there is still a terrible gap between clergy and laity in the apostolate, although I do believe we are becoming more and more conscious of it and should be able to close it.

The gap is illustrated in one final way in the phenomenon which many lay leaders have observed in the apostolate, namely, that there still is too much competition between priest and laymen in the Church, in a situation where priests are tempted to compete with the laity as man to man, instead again of recognizing the real difference of vocation. I don't want to make too much of this point, for it is largely a human failing, with errors on both sides. At times lay leaders think they are unfrocked priests, and at times priests assume lay tasks instead of entrusting them to the laity. What both should keep in mind is that it is the mystery of the priesthood which priests alone can communicate, the mystery of Christliness, or to use the words of St. Paul, the "odor of Godliness."

In calling an end to the Priest-Worker movement in France, Pope John XXIII was aware of this profound mystery of the priesthood. Our mistake would be to think he had only French priest-workers in mind. We have altogether too many priest-workers in the United States, that is, priests who are doing work that rightfully should be carried out by the laity, especially in the fields of social action.

This is where there is too much competition, in the American sense, between man and man, instead of a recognition of the very distinct vocations of priest and layman. This is what leads lay leaders to feel a lack of trust on the part of the Church in their legitimate mission to the temporal order.

This leads to one final observation before I hibernate until 1970. I register it lastly, again because it is human, and therefore simply to get it on the table for analysis. Simply this, lay leaders still find it difficult to get accepted into the fraternity of C.A. chaplains, even when matters of the lay apostolate are on the agenda. There is a certain reticence to let the laity in on it all, to take their counsel, to let them participate in the deliberations which most directly touch the laity. The fraternity is a kind of closed corporation, and while it can be excused that a small group of C.A. minded priests have been forced to ghettoize, out of self-defense and because of an inferiority position among their own professional group and because of the insecurity inherent in their pioneering, still in all a little lay leaven in the fraternity—from time to time—might turn out to be very rewarding for all concerned, if only for a discussion of some of the problems raised in this article.

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THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

Reprinted with permission from AVE MARIA (Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind.), Dec.3, 1960

An Episcopal Bishop sent his blessing.

The principal of a Protestant high school gave the invocation.

A Catholic editor made the keynote address.

This was the beginning of the first national convention of Citizens for Educational Freedom, a nonsectarian civic organization whose members mainly are parents of school children.

Delegates from seven states in the Midwest flowed into the Embassy Room of the Hotel Ambassador in St. Louis to deliberate for a day on November 12. About 150 persons were present.

They listened to Dale Francis, their keynoter, encourage them to proceed step by step by legal means to achieve the rights guaranteed them by the Constitution.

They heard Raymond Geerdes, principal of the Christian High School in Pella, Iowa, plead the cause of parents who wish to give their children a religious education without suffering financial discrimination from the states.

David LaDriere, an attorney and newly elected president of Citizens for Educational Freedom who has served the past year as executive secretary, opened the convention by reading greetings.

Among the telegrams was one from the Rt. Rev. James A. Pike, Bishop of the Episcopal Dioceses of California. He wired:

"Greetings on your first annual convention in the interest of parental rights in education. In my absence my thoughts and prayers will be with you in your important deliberations."

James P. Bick, outgoing president of CEF, reported to the convention and set the stage for the principal resolution adopted at closing.

"There are some people," said Mr. Bick, "who feel self-conscious about joining a citizens' group such as Citizens for Educational Freedom. They feel that they will be classed as a rabble-rouser, a do-gooder, or a seeker of self-interests.

"But I would like to assure you that we have no cause for feeling self-conscious. For it is basic to our democracy that its citizens organize for the purpose of swaying public opinion. . . .

"It is not only the right of citizens to organize but it is their duty to do so. For it is the nature of our system of government. If citizens do not band together to speak out for their rights, they are doing the country a disservice, since they are allowing an injustice or a violation of civil rights to continue to exist.

"Citizens for Educational Freedom has a just cause. We believe in maintaining freedom of choice in education, in preserving the independent school, and in protecting the civil rights of the 6,800,000 forgotten children in these schools. Citizens who believe in this cause should not feel self-conscious when they join CEF. They should be proud because by doing so they are performing their duty as citizens."

At day's end the CEF delegates unanimously adopted a resolution calling upon President-elect John F. Kennedy to support only a federal aid to education program which would provide assistance in the form of vouchers to be used by parents at the schools of their choice.

MR. Bick reported on some of the rather remarkable accomplishments of the organization which is just a bit more than a year old. He said that membership had grown from a founding half-dozen to 7,000. During the last year 250,000 pieces of literature have been distributed. Newspapers and magazines of national circulation have devoted articles to CEF. Yet this is only a start, Mr. Bick noted, and he said an immediate, necessary goal is to enroll 50,000 members and to set up chapters in every large city and in every state. At present there are 26 chapters. Individual members are spread through each of the 50 states of the union. Headquarters are at 3109 South Grand Blvd., St. Louis 18, Missouri.

In workshops the delegates devoted their efforts to chapter and individual activity; legislation and political action, and publicity and public relations.

An interested observer at the convention was the Rev. Virgil C. Blum, S.J., professor of political science at Marquette University, and author of the book *Freedom of Choice in Education.*

Father Blum complimented the convention on its aims and course of action and said that he thought it was clear that parents had a duty to join such an organization in order to achieve justice for themselves and their children.

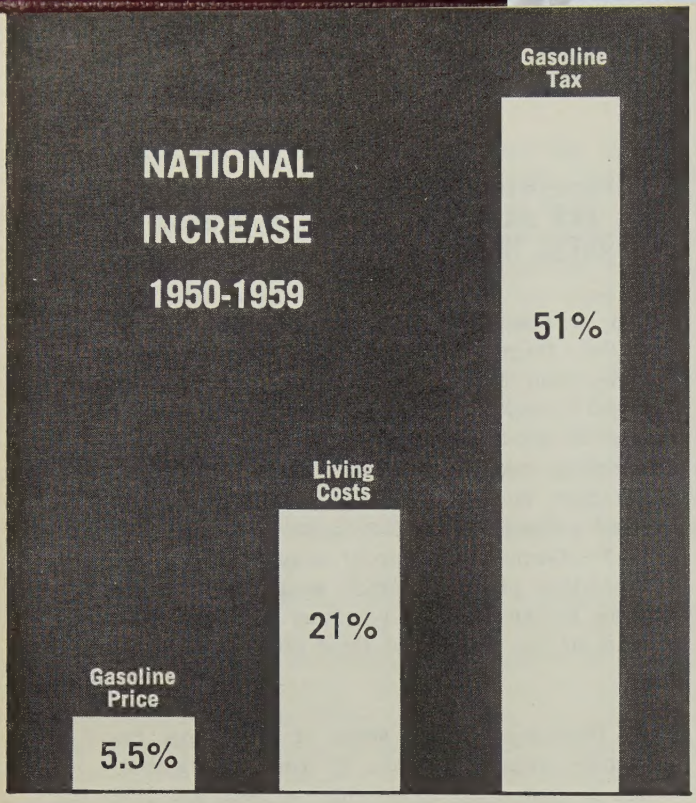
Glenn Andreas, a banker of Pella, Iowa, and chairman of the Christian schools in that city, was among the most enthusiastic persons at the convention. He praised the co-operation existing among Protestants and Catholics in Citizens for Educational Freedom.

The convention came to a close with a determination expressed by Robert Hoffman, of Erlanger, Kentucky, founder of a chapter there.

"It helps to know you're not alone in something like this," he said. "We may just be starting, but we'll never stop."

— MARTIN DUGGAN

Martin Duggan is news editor of the St. Louis "Globe-Democrat."



Gasoline taxes have increased 51 per cent in the last ten years while the basic price of gasoline has risen only 5.5 per cent.

The gasoline you buy is taxed TOO HIGH

Yet efforts are being made to add more federal and state taxes to the burden

IF YOU are an average motor vehicle owner, you will spend close to one week's pay on gasoline taxes this year. And new attempts are being made at both state and federal levels to increase the amount of gasoline taxes you pay.

State and federal gasoline taxes across the nation currently average 10 cents a gallon—or $1 for every 10 gallons of motor fuel, the energy source that has become a necessity, not a luxury, to the highly mobile American public. That is a sales tax amounting to nearly half of the basic retail price (before tax) of gasoline—a sales tax that is five times as high as the tax on diamonds, mink coats, and similar luxuries.

The gasoline tax actually equals the refinery price of the fuel in some areas.

Such excessive taxation tends to obscure the fact that gasoline is one of the most economical commodities available to the American consuming public. Except for the taxes, the current prices on regular gasoline are about the same as in 1926 and lower than in some post-World War II years. Yet, many people complain that the price of gasoline is too high.

While the cost of living has increased 21 per cent during the past 10 years, the retail price of gasoline, before taxes, has gone up only 5½ per cent. Meanwhile, combined federal and state gasoline taxes have risen 51 per cent.

Trial balloons are aloft already, seeking to extend the most recent "temporary" federal tax—or even attaching another half-cent to it—on the grounds that the federal highway program must push ahead at full speed. President Eisenhower in his special August message to the reconvened pre-election Congress referred to "proper financing to avoid delays in our interstate highway programs." He was calling for another increase in the federal gasoline tax.

About the same time, a state governor told the National Congress of Petroleum Retailers that the federal government should let the latest one-cent "temporary" gasoline-tax increase expire next July. But it wasn't the gasoline consumers' welfare he had in mind; he indicated that the states needed to levy the additional one-cent tax themselves.

The petroleum industry strongly favors more and better highways. It believes, however, that the federal highway program could be carried ahead without the current "temporary" increased tax if a large portion of the federal taxes paid by motorists were not siphoned off each year for non-highway purposes. Last year, more than $1.5 billion in special taxes paid to the federal government by highway users was spent for purposes other than highways. Thus, 40 cents of every dollar motorists paid in special federal taxes was withheld from the highway program.

Meanwhile, motorists have become price conscious and economy minded. Indications are that "economy" cars will account for a much larger share of the automobile market next year than ever before. Gasoline taxes have unquestionably reached or passed the point of diminishing returns for the tax collectors.

The Gasoline Tax Education Committee of the petroleum industry launched a promotion campaign in mid-August that is intended to bring the facts on gasoline taxation and its effect on consumer costs to the attention of the American public. The campaign, which has the approval of gasoline dealers, is national in scope but conducted in each state on the local level. It includes billboard showings, radio spot announcements, and newspaper advertisements across the nation. The campaign carries a simple, factual theme: "The gasoline you buy is taxed too high!"